



*Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Embassy, Wellington*

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Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, Hon. Jim Sutton, Minister of State, Mr. Gerry Brownlee, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, other distinguished members of Parliament, Mr. John McKinnon of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to our celebration of my country's Independence Day on the 230th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The revolutionary concepts that America's Founding Fathers set down in the Declaration of Independence - Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness - are as important today as they were then.

John F. Kennedy once said that a nation's character, like that of an individual, is elusive. It is produced by an assortment of different attributes - physical, intellectual, and spiritual. I would like to add diversity to this list of defining qualities. And it is this quality that we have chosen to celebrate here today with the theme, "We the People."

"We the People" are the three opening words of the United States Constitution. I believe that the real significance of the phrase rests in what it serves to do. It signifies clearly and decisively a people's collective statement of intent to proclaim a destiny of their own choosing.

Americans may be ethnically and culturally different, but we are all united around the shared values that are enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. "We the People" secures these differences and binds them together in a sense of community and a shared destiny.

The foods we are serving tonight represent just a few of the hundreds of different ethnic groups that make up the United States - Chinese, Mexican, Cajun and Italian.

In thinking about the People, I think, too, of the United States-New Zealand relationship. As Foreign Minister Peters said in a recent speech at a reception for Fulbright Scholars, people-to-people contacts underpin our official political and economic ties. I totally agree.

In this spirit, I have enjoyed talking with and listening to many New Zealanders. I went to Field-days, where I talked to farmers and saw world-class New Zealand agricultural products. I have spent time in Hawkes Bay, where I gained greater insight into Maori

Fisheries issues. I have visited Taranaki, where I was educated on the finer points of dog trials. I have met with many students around the country and heard their views about the United States. Some were more upbeat than others, but in all cases it was extremely valuable to listen to what each student had to say. I have talked to mayors and community leaders, and have been struck by their passion for and commitment to their respective communities.

Further afield, in Washington DC, I had the honor to be involved in the US - NZ Partnership Forum held earlier this year. In an atmosphere of cooperation and collective endeavor, the open dialogue and the sense of partnership on display from all sides of the political spectrum, from my country as well as New Zealand, deserves the highest praise. Initiatives like the Partnership Forum are vital for deepening the bonds of friendship between the United States and New Zealand. I would like to acknowledge the great work of Stephen Jacobi in New Zealand and John Mullen in Washington for their respective roles in setting up this event.

I recently participated in a service at Old St. Paul's to commemorate my country's Memorial Day. On that day we paused to remember the special relationship that the United States Armed Forces had with New Zealand during World War Two. Many marines were posted here before heading to battle in the Pacific. Such was the hospitality of individual New Zealanders that many decided to migrate to New Zealand, further deepening the bond. It is meaningful for us to recall this bond today because in May of this year the US Marine Corps returned to stand proudly at our Embassy, and they join us here tonight.

The Memorial Day event could not have happened without the work of the New Zealand - American Association, which is committed to bringing New Zealanders and Americans closer together. I would like to thank the Association for arranging the Memorial Day event and express gratitude to the Hon. Rob Talbot and his team of supporters.

Another organization that brings Americans and New Zealanders closer together is the New Zealand Fulbright Commission. Under the excellent leadership of Mele Wendt, Suzanne Snively, and the Board -- the Commission advance higher education ties between the best and brightest students New Zealand and the United States have to offer.

Sport is another great way of bringing people together. Earlier in the year, I was delighted to watch the West Point rugby team face off against the New Zealand Army rugby team. Now, I'm not going to dwell too much on the fact that the West Pointers, like many others before them, came to New Zealand and received a comprehensive -- and rather sobering -- rugby education.

I also met the Cambridge High School girls' basketball team. These young people raised a remarkable \$80,000 - by themselves - for a tour of the United States. And like the West Pointers before them, the person-to-person bonds formed by this tour group will help to deepen the ties between our two countries.

People-to-people links form the bedrock of US-New Zealand ties. But there's more good news: our Governments are also cooperating a great deal. U.S. and New Zealand troops continue to serve together in Afghanistan. Our diplomats have worked together to deliver strong messages on a variety of crucial issues, from World Trade Organization negotiations to North Korea's missile tests to the International Whaling Commission. The United States has been grateful for New Zealand's role in stabilizing the Solomon Islands and East Timor, and our two countries continue to cooperate on Pacific Island issues. Looking ahead, we are working together closely on making next year's International Polar Year a memorable success.

Some other examples of cooperation between the United States and New Zealand include two substantial agreements I have signed. The first was an agreement to share data on lost and stolen passports, which will help both our countries better secure our borders. The second was an agreement on geographic data sharing which will build on our already strong cooperation in Antarctica.

In addition to these, my good friend Roy Ferguson, as New Zealand's Ambassador to the United States, signed an agreement with my government to work together on a new power plant in Russia. This cooperative endeavor will enable the plant to use clean-burning coal and will replace an aging nuclear facility that currently produces weapons-grade plutonium.

Throughout the entire program, I have been supported by my excellent Deputy Chief of Mission, David Burnett, who will soon be departing. David's understanding of the United States - New Zealand relationship has been pivotal in advancing our mutual understanding.

I would like to talk a bit about a feature of cultural diversity that is particularly special for Gail and me. The traditional Maori welcomes we have received have touched us deeply. We have learnt a great deal about Maori treasures in museums and galleries. Our friend Darcy Nicholas of Pataka Museum has kindly loaned us contemporary Maori art which we now have in our home, for all visitors to see. These Maori artworks are displayed alongside traditional Native American treasures from the Portland Art museum and from our personal collection. This is our own way of celebrating the indigenous artists of New Zealand and America and their rich cultural heritage.

Speaking of great New Zealand and American artists, a recent highlight has been an event at my home to support the recording of The Saxophone Concerto by John Psathas. John chose American Saxophonist Joshua Redman as soloist. It was a particular delight and honor - Prime Minister - that you came to enjoy the recordings 'wrap up party' in our home.

In thinking about this year's celebration of Independence Day, I believe diversity is not just about acknowledging differences, but also about celebrating them. It is also about recognizing that shared values and pursuits unite people in a common bond of friendship.

It is an honor to serve my country in New Zealand. This country is blessed with astonishing natural beauty and majesty. The magnificence of its land is matched by the warmth and generosity of its people, who have made me and my family so welcome in our new home.

So, let us raise our glasses in celebration and toast to the peoples and Governments of the United States and New Zealand, and to the Queen!